

November 19, 2022

The Right Honourable Justin Trudeau
Prime Minister of Canada
House of Commons
Ottawa, Ontario K1A 0A6



www.bpwcanada.com

Dear Prime Minister Trudeau:

The Canadian Federation of Business and Professional Women (BPW Canada) respectfully submits the enclosed 2022 Brief for your consideration and action. The items herein represent the resolutions brought forward by our members from across the country which were debated and accepted at our national Convention held in August, 2022.

BPW Canada is a non-sectarian, non-partisan organization that promotes and practices inclusion, diversity, equity and access. Our history goes back over 90 years of advocacy for the inclusion of equal rights for women in legislation. It is through this process of voicing the issues outlined in this Brief and engaging in open dialogue with your government that we can together build a strong and thriving Canada.

On behalf of BPW Canada, I take this opportunity to acknowledge the federal government's action to advance gender equality. The National Action Plan to End Gender-Based Violence encompasses many of our resolutions and these will be a priority for the upcoming year as well as ensuring access and protection of women's reproductive rights and recovery from the pandemic, in areas such as paid and unpaid care work.

We respectfully request that you and the appropriate Ministers review the enclosed resolutions and be available to meet with our delegation at a time in keeping with your schedules. A member of BPW Canada will follow up with this correspondence with a personal contact to confirm the preferred meeting times and dates.

We commend your efforts to advance gender equality and look forward to meeting with you in the near future.

Yours truly,

Angie Godin
President 2022-2024
BPW Canada

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**Submission
to**

THE RIGHT HONOURABLE JUSTIN TRUDEAU

PRIME MINISTER OF CANADA



The Canadian Federation of Business and Professional Women

**La Fédération Canadienne des Femmes de Carrières Commerciales et
Professionnelles**

**Member of the International Federation of Business and Professional
Women**

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**Working towards improving economic, political, social, and
employment conditions for women in Canada**

“Women Working for Working Women”

November 2022

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INTRODUCTION

The Canadian Federation of Business and Professional Women (BPW Canada) is an equality seeking group working towards improving the economic, political, social and employment conditions for women. BPW Canada is a non-sectarian, non-partisan organization that promotes and practices inclusion, diversity, equity and access. Our membership includes women from a variety of professions and occupations, including entrepreneurs. BPW Canada develops the professional and leadership potential of women through education, awareness, advocacy and mentoring within the supportive network of BPW.

In 1930, BPW Canada was a founding member of the International Federation of Business and Professional Women's Clubs. BPW International has Consultative Status at the United Nations Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) since 1947 and is the recognized voice of working women in over 95 countries worldwide. As of September 30, 2021, BPW Canada also has special Consultative Status.

For over ninety years we have advocated for women's rights at all levels and have played a significant role in achieving advancements for a just and equal society. For more information on our achievements, please visit our website at www.bpwcanada.com.

Currently, local BPW Clubs across Canada offer a range of opportunities and activities for members to enhance their: Awareness, Advocacy & Action; Leadership Skills & Career Advancement; Supportive Networking; and Personal Development.

The BPW Canada Virtual Annual General Meeting was held on August 13 and 14, 2022. The resolutions contained in this document were initiated at the club level, researched, formulated, and brought to the 2022 Convention where they were debated and put to a vote. These accepted resolutions are herein presented for your consideration.

We look forward to the opportunity to meet with our federal government representatives to present our resolutions and our concerns in more detail.

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Resolution #1: Expanding Supports for Gender Based Violence (GBV) Victims in Rural, Remote and Northern (RRN) Communities

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that the Canadian Federation of Business and Professional Women (BPW Canada) urges the Government of Canada, specifically the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance, the Minister for Women and Gender Equality and Youth, the Minister of Indigenous Services and the Minister responsible for the Federal Economic Development Agency for Northern Ontario, and the Minister of Northern Affairs, Minister responsible for Prairies Economic Development Canada and Minister responsible for the Canadian Northern Economic Development Agency to work in unison to allocate adequate resources and support through equitable measures to rural, remote and northern communities to end gender based violence.

Rationale

Gender based violence (GBV) is one of the most pervasive, deadly, and deeply rooted human rights violation. GBV presents significant barriers to individual and community safety and well-being and can have significant impacts on economic independence. The COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated GBV in Canada. GBV organizations have reported increases of 20% to 50% in “calls to crisis lines, to outreach and in admissions to Violence Against Women shelters” (Canadian Women’s Foundation, 2020).

In a 2018 Statistics Canada profile, women in rural areas experienced the highest overall rate of intimate partner violence (IPV) at 789 per 100,000 population (Burczycka, M., 2022). In rural and northern communities, Indigenous women experience higher rates and more severe intimate partner violence than those living in urban areas. “According to police-reported data from the 2019 Uniform Crime Reporting Survey, the rate of IPV against women in remote areas was over four times higher than the rate among women in accessible areas (2,002 versus 445 victims per 100,000) The rate of violence committed by someone other than an intimate partner was four times higher for women in remote areas (2,182 versus 574)” (Burczycka, M., 2022).

The 2021 Federal Budget announced an investment of \$601.3 million over five years to advance a national action plan to end GBV and the Federal Budget 2022 proposed an investment of \$539.3 million over five years, starting in 2022–23, to support provinces and territories in their efforts to implement the *National Action Plan to End Gender-Based Violence*. However, in the Backgrounder to the federal budget very few organizations or municipalities in RRN communities were noted as receiving funding. It is important to take an intersectional approach to avoid and prevent negative outcomes for those in RRN communities, including indigenous women.

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Resolution #2: Support to Raise the Marriage Age in Canada to 18 years

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that the Canadian Federation of Business and Professional Women (BPW Canada) urges the Government of Canada, specifically the Minister of Justice and the Attorney General of Canada and the Minister for Women and Gender Equality and Youth, to raise the age of marriage in Canada to 18 to be in line with the age of majority in most provinces and the United Nations definitions; and to amend the Civil Marriage Act S.C. 2005 33 clause to “no person who is under the age of 18 may contract marriage”.

Rationale

“Child marriage refers to any formal marriage or informal union between a child under the age of 18 and an adult or another child” (UNICEF). Global Affairs Canada works in developing countries to educate people about the devastating effects of child, early and forced marriages and the need to eliminate this harmful practice so that girls can reach their full potential. Despite these actions, in 2015 Canada amended the Federal Civil Marriage Act to allow marriage of youth at 16 years of age with parental consent or a court order (Koski and Clark, 2021). Prior to this legislation, provinces and territories could set their own limits, some which were as low as 14 years.

According to research by Koski and Clark (2021), 3,687 marriage licenses involving minors between the ages of 16 and 18 were issued in Canada between 2000 and 2018. This is based on data from provincial vital statistics offices, which issue marriage certificates. More than 85 percent of the children married were girls in every province/territory in which a sex breakdown was possible. In addition, girls were married to older spouses relative to boys. Further study and more accurate collection methods are required to understand informal/common law unions which are not included in these numbers.

At the Human Rights Council, Canada worked with other countries to develop and sponsor resolutions to eliminate child, early and forced marriage. Canada has also worked closely with regional organizations, including the Commonwealth, la Francophonie and the African Union (Koski et al., 2017). The practice is widely considered a violation of human rights with negative consequences for health and personal development. These harms affect primarily girls, who are much more likely to be married as children than boys (Gastón, et al., 2019). Raising Canada’s domestic law to 18 years would put it in line with the international standard to which it holds other countries accountable.

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Resolution #3: Increase Awareness of Supervision for Online Child Protection

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that the Canadian Federation of Business and Professional Women (BPW Canada) urges the Government of Canada, specifically the Minister for Women and Gender Equality and Youth, the Minister of Families, Children and Social Development, the Minister of Public Safety, and the Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, to increase awareness of the available resources, including RCMP, cybertip.ca, the Canadian Red Cross, and others that relate to supervision of online activities with the goals of (1) preventing further victimization of children, and (2) supporting parents, caregivers, educators and professionals by developing a digital strategy that will protect children against online threats;

FURTHER BE IT RESOLVED that BPW Canada urges the Government of Canada, specifically the Minister for Women and Gender Equality and Youth, the Minister of Families, Children and Social Development, the Minister of Public Safety, and the Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada to develop policies and programs to protect children and youth from pornographic images and potential sexual exploitation by way of age-appropriate verification systems and measures;

AND FURTHER BE IT RESOLVED that BPW Canada urges the Government of Canada, specifically the Minister for Women and Gender Equality and Youth, the Minister of Families, Children and Social Development, the Minister of Public Safety, and the Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada to increase monitoring of all digital platforms and internet businesses and enforce regulations.

Rationale

With the introduction of the Internet, the abuse of children by unknowns has expanded exponentially, including sexual abuse and human trafficking. Canada's National Tipline for Reporting the Online Sexual Exploitation of Children revealed: 4.3 million reports of child exploitation from 2014 to 2021; 39% of luring attempts in the last 2 years were directed at children under 13 years of age; and 34% luring attempts happened on Instagram, Snapchat, or KIK Messenger (Cybertips.ca, 2022).

According to a report by Interpol and ECPAT (Interpol 2021): the younger the victim, the more severe the abuse; 84% of images contained explicit sexual activity; more than 60% of unidentified victims were prepubescent, including infants and toddlers; 65% of unidentified victims were girls; severe abuse images were likely to feature boys; and 92% of visible offenders were male.

There is a gap between police, government, and service provider responsibility/effectiveness for online child safety, and parental responsibility for online safety of children. In early 2020, "almost half of parents had not talked to their children about sextortion (46%) or sexting (42%)" and believe these issues happen "somewhere else" (Public Safety Canada, 2020). Internet Sense First | Premier Sens Internet (Doak-Gebauer, 2019), the RCMP, cypertips.ca, Canada Centre for Child Protection and the Canadian Red Cross are examples of online safety learning resources for youth and parents.

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Resolution #4: Reaffirmation of 2018-04: National Policy to Ensure Access to Sexual Assault Kits

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that the Canadian Federation of Business and Professional Women (BPW Canada) reaffirms 2018-04 and its support to urge the Government of Canada, specifically the Minister of Health, to create a national policy that ensures provinces and territories provide funding so that no sexual assault victim is denied access to a sexual assault kit due to where they live;

FURTHER BE IT RESOLVED that BPW Canada reaffirms 2018-04 and its support to urge the Government of Canada, specifically the Minister of Health and the Deputy Prime Minister of Canada and Minister of Finance to include in a national policy a requirement to allocate funding to ensure adequate staffing resources and proper training of medical staff in all locations to support timely kit processing and proper storage.

Rationale

The largest noted hurdle in sexual assault cases is in having victims report the occurrence. According to Justice Canada's Research and Statistics Division's *Just Facts* of April 2019, 83 per cent of sexual assaults are never reported to the police and of those reported, less than half (varying 41-46%) were cleared by charge. In 2016/2017, 59% of accused found guilty of sexual assault received a custodial sentence and 19% were ordered probation.

There are many instances when evidence can prove decisive in seeking justice for survivors of sexual assault. Time and accuracy are critical in evidence collection and highlights the need for Sexual Assault Evidence Kits (SAEKs). According to She Matters (2021), *Silenced: Canada's Sexual Assault Evidence Kit Accessibility Crisis*, "41% of Canadian hospitals did not have kits, relied on RCMP to bring kits or refused to disclose whether their facility had kits" at time of survey. The 'SAEK Crisis' has resulted in "survivors presenting to hospitals and health centres only to be told that they cannot be assisted as the hospital does not have SAEKs available or does not have trained staff to conduct an SAEK... In some cases, the nearest hospital is hundreds of kilometers away and can severely deter a survivor from continuing their search for healthcare and justice" (She Matters, 2021).

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Justice Canada, Research and Statistics Division. (April 2019). *Just Facts*. Retrieved from <https://www.justice.gc.ca/eng/rp-pr/jr/jf-pf/2019/docs/apr01.pdf>

She Matters.(Feb 2021). *Silenced: Canada's Sexual Assault Evidence Kit Accessibility Crisis report*. Retrieved from https://s3.amazonaws.com/kajabi-storefronts-production/sites/126060/themes/2671208/downloads/PEbLVWWpTzafkvJnQgRA_Silenced_Canada_s_Sexual_Assault_Evidence_Kit_Accessibility_Crisis_Report.pdf

Resolution #5: Support Recommendations of Report – Silenced: Canada's Sexual Assault Evidence Kit Accessibility Crisis

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that Canadian Federation of Business and Professional Women (BPW Canada) urges the Government of Canada, specifically the Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, the Minister for Women and Gender Equality and Youth and the Minister of Health to urge Health Canada to support the findings of the Recommendations of the Silenced Report, specifically by enacting legislation or implementing regulation that requires Sexual Assault Evidence Kits (SAEKs, aka kits) be available for use in all settlement areas of Canada

FURTHER BE IT RESOLVED that the Canadian Federation of Business and Professional Women (BPW Canada) urges the Government of Canada, specifically the Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, the Minister for Women and Gender Equality and Youth and the Minister of Health to urge Health Canada to further support the findings of the Recommendations of the Silenced Report by the following:

- a. create a national database for public use listing all hospitals and health centres with SAEKs, available trained staff and storage facilities
- b. supply federal funding to ensure every province and territory has sexual assault related sensitivity training for all hospital staff, including triage staff and phone operators; and
- c. create federal regulations that ensure all students in nursing and medical schools learn sexual assault evidence collection.

Rationale

The largest noted hurdle in sexual assault cases is in having victims report the occurrence (Prochuk, 2018). According to Justice Canada's Research and Statistics Division (April 2019), 83 per cent of sexual assaults are never reported to the police and of those reported, less than half (varying 41-46%) were cleared by charge. In 2016/2017, 59% of accused found guilty of sexual assault received a custodial sentence and 19% were ordered probation.

There are many instances when evidence can prove decisive in seeking justice for survivors of sexual assault. Time and accuracy are critical in evidence collection and highlights the need for Sexual Assault Evidence Kits (SAEKs). According to She Matters (2021), *Silenced: Canada's Sexual Assault Evidence Kit Accessibility Crisis*, "41% of Canadian hospitals did not have kits, relied on RCMP to bring kits or refused to disclose whether their facility had kits" at time of survey. The 'SAEK Crisis' has resulted in "survivors presenting to hospitals and health centres only to be told that they cannot be assisted as the hospital does not have SAEKs available or does not have trained staff to conduct an SAEK... In some cases, the nearest hospital is hundreds of kilometers away and can severely deter a survivor from continuing their search for healthcare and justice" (She Matters, 2021).

Improved access to SAEKs can be attained by removing long delays in process or extended travel for survivors, providing sufficient and accessible kits, ensuring trained staff are available to administer the kits and that there is adequate evidence storage in place.

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Justice Canada, Research and Statistics Division. (April 2019). *Just Facts*. <https://www.justice.gc.ca/eng/rp-pr/jr/jf-pf/2019/docs/apr01.pdf>

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